

Montgomery County Forest Conservancy District Board



Minutes for the Montgomery County Forest Conservancy District Board Meeting – 11 March 2025

This meeting was called to order by Board Chairman Jim Harris at 1:43 PM.

The minutes pertaining to the last meeting that occurred on 14 January 2025 were approved with minor corrections at 1:47 PM.

Chair's Report (1:48 PM)

Board Chairman Jim Harris reported that the Rockville Chapter of the Izaak Walton League of America wishes to submit their funding for the Natural Resources Career Camp (NRCC) directly to the Maryland Forestry Foundation so that the foundation may post the league's logo along with other sponsors on the NRCC website. Jim mentioned that he will send an email to Dawn Balinski expressing thanks for the inquiry, and to indicate that the Board would support this arrangement. Jim mentioned that Dave Honchalk sent him an email recommending a ninth-grade student from Poolesville High School to attend this year's NRCC session.

Board Chairman Jim Harris shared with the Board several Maryland Urban and Community Forestry Committee (MUCFC) grant applications that he received and approved for various stewardship projects: One grant application in the amount of \$998.75 was requested by St. Bartholomew's Church in Laytonsville, Maryland for a wildlife habitat project on the church's grounds, another grant application in the amount of \$995.30 was requested by the Friends of Seneca Creek and Patuxent River State Parks to replace bamboo with native shrubs at the Patuxent River State Park Visitor Center, and another grant application in the amount of \$1,000.00 was requested by Nature Forward to conduct forest-to-meadow ecotone restoration in Chevy Chase, Maryland.

Board Chairman Jim Harris reported that a Montgomery County constituent contacted the Board requesting assistance and guidance for conducting a timber harvest on her property. Board Secretary Chris Barger responded to her request and provided her with appropriate guidance. Jim also mentioned that Dawn Balinski sent an email to all county forest conservancy district boards encouraging full enrollment in this year's NRCC session. Dawn also forwarded Jim and Chris an email from a constituent asking for guidance to protect a tree from construction activities. Chris mentioned that he would respond to the constituent. Jim noted that Ashley Triplett-Peltzman, Associate Director of Policy and Planning for Maryland's Department of Natural Resources, sent an email on 17 February 2025 featuring a suite of proposed legislature pertaining to natural resources. Jim passed around a summary of the bills for Board members to read.

Treasurer's Report (2:02 PM)

Treasurer Joli McCathran was not present for this meeting; however, she disclosed the Treasurer's Report in an email correspondence with Board Chairman Jim Harris and Board Secretary Chris Barger. Since the last meeting, Joli wrote a check in the amount of \$95.14 to Board Member Carole Bergman on 13 January 2025 for mileage expenses, and a donation from Pepco in the amount of \$3,000.00 was received and processed on 15 January 2025. The former combined account balance was \$4,677.26 and the current combined account balance is \$7,582.12, corresponding to a net change of \$2,904.86.

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Legislative Report (2:05 PM)

No legislative report was given at this meeting.

DNR Report (2:05 PM)

No DNR report was given at this meeting.

New Business (2:05 PM)

Assistant Board Chairman Dan Landry requested that each member of the Board's subcommittee bring a copy of their favorite tree identification resource to the next meeting. Dan wishes to compile a list of these resources so that students attending Montgomery County Public Schools may use them to identify trees. Dan mentioned that there is currently substantial interest in remote sensing technology among utility professionals. He reported that Pepco is conducting three remote sensing pilot projects aimed at preventing power interruptions and reducing the risk of causing wildfires.

At 2:18 PM, Board Member Vince Fillah reported that he would be conducting big tree measurements on 18 March 2025, and he posited general suggestions to augment the Big Tree Program. Vince mentioned that he would contact Board Member Lee Derby to inquire about accessing the Board's stock of high visibility vests. Vince noted that these vests are important for board members to wear when conducting field work.

At 2:23 PM, Board Member Norman King III recounted aspects of his recent visit to Los Angeles, California. He mentioned how sad it was to observe the destruction left in the wake of the devastating wildfires that occurred around the time of his visit. He also noted that the air was difficult to breathe because of its dense concentration of particulate matter from the fires.

At 2:27 PM, Board Member Andrés Ovalle mentioned that an Arbor Day celebration is proposed for 21 April at 12 PM. He mentioned that Laura Miller, Forest Conservation Coordinator with Montgomery County's Department of Environment Protection, will send out an official invitation to celebrate the 10-year anniversary of the Tree Montgomery shade tree planting program. Andrés mentioned that over 3,000 shade trees were planted through the Tree Montgomery program within the past year, and with a focus on planting in low equity areas. Andrés mentioned that he would be happy to work on developing a map and brochure representing the location of public County Champion Trees to promote public awareness of champion trees. Andrés suggested that all board members compile a list of their 25 favorite County Champion Trees in preparation for the board's next meeting. The Board discussed the creation of a new subcommittee to address promoting public awareness of champion trees.

At 2:45 PM, Board Secretary Chris Barger summarized the State of Maryland Department of Natural Resources' proposed changes for county forest conservancy district boards. Board Chairman Jim Harris mentioned that he will send out an email to all board members containing information that summarizes these proposed changes as well. Chris mentioned that he will send out an email to all board members requesting their votes for Montgomery County's three best fifth-grade Arbor Day posters. These posters will represent the county's submission in this year's Fifth-Grade Arbor Day Poster Contest.

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At 3:05 PM, Board Member Natasha Shangold mentioned that the City of Rockville has hired a new Forest Conservation Planner, and she will invite him to attend the Board's next meeting. The new Forest Conservation Planner has been busy conducting inspections for the city.

At 3:06 PM, Guest Attendee Jack Pond commented on Montgomery County Department of Transportation's right-of-way planting operations. Jack also commented on the available funding from grants to plant trees in the County's rights-of-way. Jack noted that this year's Montgomery County's Green Fest celebration will occur on 26 April 2025 from 11 AM to 4 PM at the Marian Fyrer Town Plaza, 2424 Reddie Drive in Wheaton, Maryland 20902.

At 3:19 PM, Board Member Carole Bergman noted that the Maryland Department of Natural Resources' proposed changes for county forest conservancy district boards include the fact that the Board's website would no longer be managed by the Board. Carole noted that she will be participating in guided walks for Nature Forward and the Maryland Native Plant Society. Carole will send out an email inviting board members to participate in a field trip. Carole finally mentioned that she is also working on a relief program for Montgomery Countryside Alliance.

At 3:24 PM, Board Member Paula Perez mentioned that the City of Rockville is working through year three of its five-year tree pruning and maintenance schedule.

At 3:25 PM, Board Member Joe Howard mentioned that he will forestall his commentary until a later meeting.

Chairman Jim Harris adjourned this meeting at 3:26 PM.

The next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, 8 April 2025 at 1:30 PM. The meeting will be located at the Lathrop E. Smith Environmental Education Center's library at 5110 Meadows Lane in Rockville, MD 20855.

Attendance:

Jim Harris, Board Chairman
Dan Landry, Assistant Board Chairman
Chris Barger, Board Secretary
Carole Bergmann, Board Member
Vince Fillah, Board Member
Joe Howard, Board Member
Mary Howard, Guest
Norman King III, Board Member
Andrés Ovalle, Board Member
Paula Perez, Board Member
Jack Pond, Guest
Natasha Shangold, Board Member